1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1



Woman's work in Greece, as elsewhere, does not lend itself to neat, logical treatment. It does not have a beginning or any definable end. As a result, discussion of it moves from one topic to another with no necessary connection between them except the fact of the woman's involvement. As a wife, she is a partner to her husband; she bears and mothers the children; she prepares the food and still makes much of the clothing at home; she helps with the farm tasks; she has the responsibility for keeping the family well, or at least seeing an ailing member through an illness. To follow the women through the variety of these experiences is to move to the center of family life in rural Greece.

## Getting Along with the Lord and Master

The world of the Greek woman revolves around the man. When young, her first concern — and the concern of her family — is to find a man and, through a dowry, "buy" him. After marriage she moves unobtrusively in his orbit and keeps their children, when they begin to arrive, in their proper course. Tradition still influences the way the woman gets along with the man.

In any social relationship, including that between husband and wife, a pattern of dominance and subordination develops. The Greeks assume that the man has the higher position. One village woman, when commenting on this, said with genuine earnestness: "My husband is a superior being; I must keep my distance." This sentiment is reflected in the relative social status of men and women, as well as in legal, moral, political, and economic rights. But even in delineating the differences in status between husband and wife one must bear in mind that broad social changes are under way throughout all of Greece which are leading to a rise in woman's position.

Some indication of woman's place is given by the preference for boys over girls. In some parts of Greece, a man when asked how many children he has will reply: "Two sons and, begging your pardon, one daughter." Or he might say: "Two children, one girl." In some villages of Thrace, however, the father might use a poetic touch in answering "two sons, one guest," implying that the daughter's permanent home is that of her husband. Since, true to the patriarchal, agrarian tradition, the line is continued in the son, one of the tests of a father's manliness is his ability to procreate sons. Preference for a son is reinforced by the need to collect a dowry for a daughter, who thus represents an economic drain. Indeed, the interest in the sex of the unborn child is so great that many ways have been developed for predicting the birth of a boy or a girl. Such practices, although taken jokingly or at best semiseriously by many, do figure prominently in women's conversations.

In Aetolia a relatively simple method may be used. One need only take a piece of wood from the loom, put it in a public road, and see who passes over it. If a man does, a boy is on the way; if a woman, a girl. In Gortynia,

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1



### A Village Baptism

One ceremony which has deep meaning for the family members is the baptism of a recently arrived infant. First of all comes the selection of godparents, although this is usually determined by the custom of having those who were sponsors at the wedding also be godparents of the children which issue from that marriage. But if many children have come subsequently it is only fitting that the honor be given to someone else. The father is free to invite some notable, say a political figure from the area, to serve as godfather, an opportunity which few politicians pass up. On the other hand, if the couple is dissatisfied with the godparent who would normally be invited, it may follow traditional procedures to select another. An inquiry into these takes one deeply into folklore and belief in magic. When childlessness, stillbirth, or infant mortality is blamed upon the godparent, villagers assume that a new godparent might lead to better success. According to Chrysoula, the wise woman of Spetsai, her sister bore a child who died within twenty-four hours after birth, and later on she had a pseudo-pregnancy. In her desperation she prayed to the Virgin: "Please give me a child of either sex. If it is a girl I'll give her your name; if it is a boy I'll dedicate it to you but will have to give it the name of its paternal grandparent." This was on the morning of March 25 (Evangelismos Day); that afternoon she had intercourse with her husband and on Christmas Day a little girl was born. As soon as she was able, the mother picked up the baby, put the baby on the porch of the church dedicated to the Virgin, and waited to see who would discover the baby and, by so doing, be designated godparent. People standing around consider it lucky to be a godparent on such an occasion, and several may be inclined to volunteer. An especially eager person may throw a handkerchief ahead of a rival and thus stake out a claim. The mother watches from a distance. When the child has been taken into the church for the ceremony, she goes home to prepare sweets and other food for the baptismal feast.

The same procedure for gaining a new godparent as a replacement for the one who sponsored the wedding of the couple is followed in most parts of Greece but occurs only infrequently, since people reluctantly change their godparent ties. Once the godparents have been selected, the guests have to be invited — relatives and very close friends or, as was fortunate in my case, an interested foreigner who happens to be in the vicinity. The women of the household allow themselves a few days in advance to plan and prepare for the festive occasion. The church ceremony is a lively affair. If the child is baptized within forty days of birth, as it usually is, the mother does not attend, for she is still unclean. The principals in the ceremony are the priest, the infant, and the godparent, with the latter's responsibility supposedly extending to the spiritual oversight of the godchild, today a matter of

1:Sanders Z-5 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1



little importance. (A pregnant woman is not supposed to serve as a koumbara, for people say that something bad will happen either to her or the child being baptized. A person is also supposed to baptize only children of the same sex, for if he serves as a koumbaros of both boys and girls, two of these with the same godparent might fall in love, which would be considered incest since spiritual bonds count as much as biological kinship in determining marriage prohibitions.)

After the small group of friends and relatives has gathered, the priest comes out from behind the altar. He usually displays great skill in handling the infant, even if the baby starts to howl his displeasure at the proceedings. The priest first turns the baby toward the east, blows into its face three times to chase away the evil spirits, seals it with the sign of the cross, and utters four exorcisms against temptation. Then the godparent renounces for the child "the devil and all his works" in answer to a thrice-repeated question from the priest, after which he recites the Apostles' Creed.[1]

The tepid water standing in a large copper basin is next blessed by the priest, who pours consecrated oil on it. Then the godparent, who has rubbed the baby all over with oil, hands it to the priest who three times plunges it into the font while he recites the appropriate formula. Once the immersion has been completed, the priest anoints the baby in different parts of its body and holds it up to the altar three times if it is a boy. The baby is next dressed and carried around the font three times by the godparent who holds a candle in one hand; the priest also joins in this procession. The ceremony concludes with additional words from the New Testament and a few words of admonition to the child, whereupon those present congratulate the godparent with the wish, "may it live." Then everyone goes to the home of the parents for a tremendous dinner, usually featuring roast lamb, which is just as important a part of the affair as the church ceremony. The godparent is given a place of high honor. (He also has had the responsibility of choosing the name for the child, usually that of a grandparent.[2])

Although I have attended many social functions in Greece, the joy and fun which characterize the baptismal feasts stand out in my memory. Not only is the food delicious and plentiful, but there is invariably plenty of wine and good-natured bantering. Most of the time, too, there is dancing, spirited and informal. Children of the guests as well as the brothers and sisters of the newly baptized infant are often present, and manage to end up in the dance or very much in its way, thereby adding to the general merriment. Weddings, such as the one described in the previous chapter, are occasions for merriment because they give promise of providing children, especially boys, to continue the family line; the baptism is merry because this promise has been fulfilled.

2: Friedl E-5 (1955-1959) 963 EH1 Greece EH1
Vasilika



the village attracts, and the villagers comment on their satisfaction at seeing some different faces.

A caveat may be in order here, however. No matter how much the villagers like the variety of life in the towns, and no matter how much they dislike the tiring and messy work on the farms, when they actually live in the village and are engaged in the work in the fields and at home, they work hard, steadily, and with a will. The people of Vasilika do not believe work is ennobling in itself; they seem to have no compulsive need to work to achieve self-respect, but they accept the need for hard labor as a means to the end of support for the family. Therefore, the villagers expect the farmer and his household to work hard and for long hours if an agricultural existence is their immediate fate, but do not condemn some farmer if he tries to arrange a different fate for his children. If he is unsuccessful, and all his sons stay on the farm, or if his daughters are married off to farmers, there is no disgrace in that either, as long as he did the best he could. And if a farmer can bequeath a good farm to any of his sons and the son manages the property skillfully, the economic success of the farm brings a measure of prestige, in Vasilika, to father and son alike.

Within the context of these values let us consider how the dowry and inheritance system functions in Vasilika. Sometimes after a farmer marries and has had at least one child, it would appear that he and his wife consider the question of how many more children it would be sensible for them to have. The parents recognize that the more children they have, the harder it will be to provide adequately for the future of each of them. Therefore, regulation of the size of families is accepted in the village as obviously prudent and sensible. The villagers explain that more children survive nowadays as a result of modern medical care, and that this obviates the need to have a large family in the hope that at least two or three of the children will reach maturity. In Vasilika, some prenatal care and confinement in one of the proprietary hospitals in Levadhia is recognized now as the safest kind of maternity care and also has the most prestige (Friedl 1958). Such care immediately increases the cost of childbirth and is a drain on the family's resources. But even those families whose babies are born at home with the aid of a traveling government-trained midwife are expected, as we have seen, to provide better food and finer clothing for their children than earlier generations provided for theirs. The added expense of rearing children has not been counterbalanced by any increase in their economic value on the farms. On the contrary, less labor is regularly needed, as Chapter 2 has shown.

The trend to smaller families seems to have started back in the 1920's. Genealogies show that the parents of the marriageable young adults of the middle and late 1950's had already limited the size of their families to a mode of four children in contrast to their parents who typically had had eight. The overt statements made by married men and women of all ages including the sixty- and seventy-year-old widows indicate that the change is deliberate and coincides with their expressed attitudes. Parents who have more children than they can adequately feed and care for are accused of behaving like animals; they

2:Friedl E-5 (1955-1959)/963 EH1 Greece EH1
Vasilika



are said to have neither brains nor self-control. Parents with marriageable children were, therefore, in 1961, contemplating the division of their estates into fewer portions than their parents had done before them.

As his children are growing up, a farmer calculates approximately what he must give his daughter or daughters for dowries and how much will be left for each of his sons to share. If it is fairly obvious that the share left for the sons will be insufficient to support each of them, the farmer tries to make some other provision for one or more of the boys. Any boy who shows promise as a student is encouraged to continue his schooling beyond the compulsory sixth-grade elementary school in the village. Education is so highly prized that sometimes even an only son who might inherit an adequate farm is allowed to continue his education if he shows ability in academic subjects. The next step after elementary school most commonly chosen by the villagers is the six-year classical or humanistic gymnasium which serves as a necessary base for any civil service or white-collar post, and also for further study in the university or in specialized advanced technical schools. Although there are some private gymnasia, most of the farmers of Vasilika have sent their sons to the virtually free public institutions (Antonakaki 1955:39). These are in the provincial towns or in Athens, so that although there is little tuition charge, the farmer must pay for his son's board and room, for his school supplies, and for adequate clothing. Whenever possible, children are boarded with an aunt or uncle who lives in the town, but even under these conditions, farmers pay a fee to the relatives to cover the cost of their children's care. Sometimes, to keep food costs down, a mother prepares a basket of bread, cheese, and perhaps a vegetable stew for her son, places it in the bus bound for the town in which the boy goes to school, and the boy picks up the basket at the bus depot.

Whatever the particular arrangement, schooling involves an expenditure of current income, and the farmers consider that the cost of educating a son is about equivalent to a major portion of his share of the inheritance. The Greek Civil Code makes a specific provision for this view by declaring that educational expenses beyond those normally to be expected from the economic position of the family may be counted as part of the inheritance (Section 1895). In Vasilika it is assumed that a gymnasium-educated young man will spend the rest of his life living in some town, and that he will receive only a token share of the land after his father's death or at the time of the division of the estate. His parents, brothers, and sisters remaining in the villages as farmers gain in social stature and in potential actual advantage from his residence in town in a prestige-giving occupation. Both the legal code and village custom, then, involve the recognition that when farmers or shepherds undertake to educate their sons beyond the village school, they are striving for an improved status position in the nation as a whole, and that if sons succeed in the new prestige-giving occupation, they are the agents of upward social mobility for the family. Among Vasilika's land-owning farmers, an educated son gives the village the added advantage of a larger amount of land to divide among the remaining children. For farmers and shepherds who have very small land holdings or none at all, the

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957

EH1 Greece EH1

Kotta

[Hill Villages]



rillas. A total of 225 children, between the ages of two and twelve, had been taken north in the early stages of the war, and only three had returned. A few letters had come from some of them, originating in places as remote as Turkestan, Poland and Czechoslovakia; but most had not been heard from, and no one in the village knew whether they were alive or dead.

The evacuation of the village children may well have been conceived by the guerrilla authorities as a humanitarian measure. Considering the state of the village as I saw it in 1947, such an interpretation seems quite plausible. This was not the way the bereft parents viewed the matter, however. They gave no very coherent explanation of why the children were taken, but the abduction was remembered in 1956 as the greatest crime the guerrillas committed. Not a few parents have been left childless, and this, by traditional village standards, is a bitter disaster. Who will look after them in their old age?

Still another factor in the drastic depopulation of Kotta has been emigration. As soon as communications with the outside world became possible again, relatives rallied round in Toronto and Sydney, and helped a total of fifty-six persons to emigrate. The process is still going on. When I visited the village in 1956, a young man and his mother were on the verge of departure for Australia, where they would join cousins who were financing the voyage.

Yet in spite of the sorrows which have visited every family in the village, and in spite of the terrible suffering all have been through, the spirit of the village in 1956 seemed amazingly relaxed and calm – almost happy. The survivors gave the impression of being profoundly surprised to find themselves still alive. But what is more important, everyone now has enough to eat. The village land can feed the population; there is now no need to look for work outside; and remittances from abroad permit some families to indulge in small luxuries – kerosene lamps, for example.

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1
Kotta

[Hill Villages]



621
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433

limits of the hill valleys. In times past, Balkan hillsmen then had to seek sustenance from the plains, either by peaceful labor or by armed forays.

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As far as Kotta and villages like it are concerned, it now seems to me an open question whether the old cycle will repeat itself again or whether new standards of expectation and conduct will make sufficient inroads upon the traditional peasant family system to check early marriage and rapid multiplication of numbers. Through overseas emigration, the modern city has made its mark on Kotta. All but a few young people want to leave, and many have done so. At the same time, the handful who remain appear to be conforming to the old ways. Perhaps the critical turn will come as their children grow up; for if the rising generation elects to look beyond the confines of the village – and if the possibilities of migration, either within Greece or overseas, exist – then, perhaps, as the population of the village begins to press once again upon the limits of local production, the young people may decline to continue the old, economically suicidal pattern, and will instead seek their fortunes far afield, and refuse to marry into hopeless poverty at home. It depends more than anything else, perhaps, upon the degree of communication that may come to exist between the outside world and the villagers. In 1956 these contacts were limited. Newspapers came seldom; vehicles rarely. But the village did [20] possess a radio that brought daily news from Athens; and emigrants' letters were perhaps the most important of all the channels of contact with the great world beyond the valley in which Kotta nestles.

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842

Survivors of the older generation – those who have lost their children to the guerrillas – seem to have no doubts or reservations in wishing to see more and more children about again. The priest complained of how empty and joyless the village was without the throngs of children he knew before. He deeply

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1
Kotta

[Hill Villages]



regretted the loss of five of his own whom the guerrillas had taken. Yet he was fortunate in having one child still with him, a girl who was too young to leave her mother when the guerrillas took the older children. As for the attitudes of the younger generation in the village, I could not satisfy myself. In the presence of their elders, they generally kept quiet, and certainly refrained from any overt dissent. Whether they, too, shared the traditional view that the more children one has the better off one is (assured thereby of God's blessing and of sustenance in old age), I could not tell.

## CHERASIA

Cherasia is a village in Thessaly near the base of Mount Pelion, some six air miles from Volos, the fourth city of Greece. Along the winding road, however, it lies about twelve miles from Volos; and before 1952 the only road connection with the village required a detour of about twenty-four miles around the mountain. The community is an old one. Local tradition holds that it was founded 680 years ago. Until the Germans destroyed the "upper" village in 1943, the community led a semi-migratory life, spending the summer months high up the mountain where a natural spring supplied water, and coming down to the foot of the mountain only in winter, when the flocks could pasture on the stubble of other villages' grain fields. The villagers looked upon the upper village as their real home, the lower one as only a temporary shelter.

The traditional occupations of the village were sheepherding and charcoal burning. Once upon a time, sixty or seventy years ago, the main support of the community may well have been sheep, pastured on the rough mountain in summer, and on grain stubble in the winter. Then, by degrees, charcoal burning and woodcutting became more important. Two factors presumably

/21 cont./ The one crop farming in most cases develops many economic and social difficulties. The peddlers of finished goods in the villages absorb a large part of the trade. Usually in exchange for their goods they get live poultry and eggs.

The biological function. The morals are very strict in the village. In the grammar school the children are /22/ together but after the age of 15 one seldom finds boys and girls playing together. Only the close relatives have an approved right to dance with a girl or walk with her to the market. The boys get married at from 18-25 and the girls from 15 to 20 years of age. The period from 15 to 20 is spent by the girl in preparing her dowry. She is busy at the loom or in embroidery with the needle and thread. One of the desired qualities of the girl is to have her handmade stuff. The ultimate aim of the marriage is to have children. If it happens that she cannot have a child the first year of her married life then gossip will start in the village of her inability to bear a child. Just the way a farmer thinks about a cow not calving, so do the relatives and especially the father and mother-in-law. There is no limit as to the number of the children, as long as both husband and wife are healthy. The usual belief and excuse is, "God gave them and He will take care of them." Both young men and the young women are instructed as to their duties as fathers and mothers. Birth control has no place here. Nature takes care of it. The strongest of the children survive under the conditions that are available for living. Besides, to use any method of preventing birth to a child is thought to be an immoral act. Thus out of seven to eight children in a family about five survive up to the age of six and the rest /23/ die before then.

Size of families. The size of families varies in Megali Vrisi. One finds the largest numbers among Caucasians and the smallest among Thracians. The Caucasians used to live in compound families and still they stick to this idea even though it was broken down due to the new method of distribution of land. Even today one finds as large as 25 members in the family and as low as 3 members in the family. The compound family makes farming

/65 cont./

Medical care. The only village in the area that has the best medical service is Megali Vrisi. The efforts of the nurse and the doctor slowly are gaining ground and more and more the people follow their principles of caring for the sick. The newly-erected hospital in the nearby city of Kilkis provides care for the inhabitants of the area free of charge. If the patient is very sick he usually is taken there, where he can find specialized doctors. 758 759 [178] [743]

The construction of the living houses is so poorly done in the village that the care of the sick under such conditions is hard. The windows are small and the mud floor with severe cold winds of the winter and no proper fuel to warm the house makes it harder yet to care for the sick. 758 362

The mutual assistance of relatives in sickness as well as of neighbors is great. People at times of /66/ great difficulties help each other, not only through labor but by giving each other food and even money. Especially is this characteristic of this people to share alike each other's burdens and partake actively in their grief and sorrow. 758 476 621

The Faith Healer. People of experience and cleverness perform certain magical performances that convince the people of their ability to command the spirits. Most of the inhabitants of Megali Vrisi believe them and spend money and time to visit them. People suffering from chronic diseases, or if born with defects of the body, or if unable to bear any child, find as the answer to their discouraged condition the faith healers. 755 [842]

Some Saints who perform miracles for donating to them; a lamb, a hen, a goat, or a cow, may, in return, act favorably for the patient. Priests praying for the sick or for the crippled are not uncommon. On special holidays, certain churches fill up with such sick and crippled people. Some sleep in the church for weeks without food and pray continuously to the Saint. Stories circulate that some one saw the Saint riding on the horse, are very common. Sometimes these saints actually do heal indirectly local pains, even of the partly crippled. Even doctors 755 782 776 [793] [787]

584 increasing freedom in the lives of young people, particularly in
882 Athens. Yet here too the web of relationships and extended responsibility is so widespread that the family, in effect, has its eyes on the young people wherever they go.

MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE

842 The Greeks love children. Boys are generally preferred; traditionally, sons are a sign of family vigour. Besides, a family not only loses its daughters, it has to pay out property with them. Childlessness is a terrible calamity, and the woman is held responsible. People say "the poor man", pitying the husband for his wife's sterility. A recent magazine report on current scientific discoveries combats this belief, telling its readers that potent men have been found to be sterile and that therefore wives are not always at fault for the childlessness of the family. Women fear to have anything done to their reproductive organs and will accept "maternity difficulties" without asking for medical help, lest this might somehow harm their fertility. A book
581 on maternal and child care, *For the Mother*, urges that before marriage, both family histories be examined for possible sterility.

*For the Mother* urges young people to choose mates with a view to progeny. As a sanction, it mentions that the ancient Greeks urged eugenic marriages; and that the term "eugenics" was invented by Xenophon. Young people are advised to see a doctor before making the final decision. They are further advised to choose according to firmness of flesh and orderliness of features and limbs, for seriousness tempered with cheerfulness, for optimism implemented by effective energy. Marriage with kin, and with people having family histories of tuberculosis, syphilis, alcoholism, psychasthenia, is to be avoided.

843 According to this manual, a young woman beginning a pregnancy is expected to notice first an indisposition, accompanied by the non-appearance of the menses: this the husband diagnoses for her with great joy. Next come the food whims and the nausea, and this is the time to go for obstetrical advice. The first two months are the critical ones for the life of the embryo; therefore, a mother is urged to take a vacation in the second month. After that she may resume her normal activities, taking care only to avoid over-exertion and jerky movements
[515] In the last month she should not immerse herself in bathing, because of the danger of infection; for the same reason, she should avoid sexual intercourse in the last three weeks. In the last two weeks she
[513] should avoid all exertion. She should sleep eight to ten hours daily during her pregnancy, never more, lest she become listless and melancholy. She should avoid large social gatherings, she should not play cards, she should drink nothing stronger than light wine, she should eat meals as balanced as is consistent with her means and her

10: Lodge S-5 (1919, 1939)1941

EF6 Serbs EF6
Contemporary Macedonians EF8
Greece EH1



S CM 165

with their fatalistic creed. The infant mortality among the Albanian families investigated was not found to be statistically different from that among Slavs.

The maternal mortality was calculated on all Slavs (irrespective of religion) of *Groups A* and *B* in villages and towns, and was found to be 3·3 per thousand live and still-births, or 4·4 if the doubtful cases were included. (The total number of births was respectively 4884 and 1525, twins and triplets being counted as one birth.) The figure for all Slavs of *Group C* in villages and towns was 2·7, or 3·4 including the doubtful cases (based on a total of 4775 and 1116 births respectively). These maternal-mortality figures are very low, especially when the rough-and-ready circumstances of childbirth are recollected. Yet this would be expected for a hardy, virile, and intelligent people who have a hard environment to contend with, and, in villages at any rate, none of the modern aids of the social services; and among whom the death rate of infants is comparatively high.[2]

S CM 842

There seems to be little artificial restriction of families; and the use of contraceptives is rarely practised in villages. Sometimes simple methods of birth control are now employed—more often in towns than in villages. I have come across the following. To prevent conception, the women wash out the vagina with strong pure vinegar made from wine, considering it very sure, because of its strength and acidity. The men sometimes use sheaths, which are expensive. Pessaries can also be bought by the women, but frequently husbands will not permit their use, beating their wives if they discover them. Greek women round Salonika use boric powder (*aršit* or *aršik*), with which they dust out the vagina as far up as possible. They told some Serbian women that this was very effective, as well as being very cheap.

G [842]

S CM 847

Abortion is legally forbidden, but, on occasions, it is performed by midwives and doctors. Women themselves when wishing to induce abortion drink a mixture of very strong *rakija* and a quantity of cartridge-shot boiled up together. This concoction must be drunk as hot as possible. At the same time hot bottles or bricks must be applied to the waist and abdomen. This is considered very effective, although one woman told me that she had tried it repeatedly after her fourth conception, but found it quite useless, and at nine months gave birth to a perfectly healthy normal child. Another woman from Serbian Macedonia said that she did not want another child because she had become infected with syphilis by her husband. (She had borne two live children, one of them infected.) She tried drinking a decoction of boiled oleander leaves, and sometimes also one of the boiled leaves of the basil plant: this latter was very bitter. She drank them repeatedly from the first month onwards; and applied hot bricks back and front. Not until the fourth month did she induce abortion, when she was very ill

[1] The maternal mortality in England and Wales in 1933 was 4·5 per thousand, and in 1930 was 5·4. The infant mortality in 1933 was 64; but as recently as 1900 and 1910 the death rate of infants in England and Wales was 154 and 165 respectively—not so vastly different from these Jugoslav villages and towns. It may also be of interest to note that in a 1940 book of reference, in the list of infant mortality for various countries, that for Jugoslavia as a whole was 137 per thousand births, and for England and Wales 58.